

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

5 February 2016

Transmitted by email

The National Spiritual Assemblies
of the Bahá'ís of Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada,
France, Germany, India, Ireland, the Netherlands,
New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden,
Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Last summer, your Offices of External Affairs took part in wide-ranging consultations at the Bahá'í World Centre related to the defence of the Bahá'í community in Iran. The consultations addressed changes in world affairs and included consideration of the implications of the expected increasing economic opportunities in Iran and how this might affect that government's attitude towards human rights and the Bahá'ís. It was observed that Iran's pursuit of new economic ties would naturally necessitate a significant increase in interactions with the international community. Of course, the Bahá'í community takes no position on such affairs between governments. However, concerted and sustained efforts should be made by selected Offices of External Affairs to remind governments that the struggle to protect human rights, and in particular the rights of religious minorities, cannot be abandoned. Various lines of action were envisaged to impress upon the government of Iran this important concern, and it was noted that international pressure continues to be an effective way to prompt consideration of human rights, including those of the Bahá'ís. One specific action agreed upon was that officials travelling to Iran should receive briefings and be invited to consider voicing their disquiet during their visits, at least privately but even publicly, about the situation of the Bahá'ís; such expressions of concern not only put pressure on the government but are also a source of hope to the Bahá'ís in Iran and to those human rights lawyers, activists, and intellectuals inside the country who put their lives at risk in order to fight the injustices meted out to minorities. Similarly, when Iranian authorities are travelling abroad, the officials hosting their visits and the journalists who encounter them can be encouraged to publicly voice their concerns about the plight of religious minorities, including the Bahá'ís.

Some governments have already sent delegations to and have received representatives from Iran, and many expect to do so in the coming weeks. If opportunities are not to be missed, Offices of External Affairs will need to remain constantly alert to such visits and to the timely briefing of those travelling to Iran. We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to request that you ask your Offices of External Affairs to direct those friends responsible for the defence work to reflect regularly on last summer's consultations and, in an informed and timely way, take whatever further actions they deem possible to ensure that their contacts in relevant

government departments and international organizations are fully aware that there has been no decrease in the incidents of persecution against the Bahá'ís living in Iran. Indeed, it should be brought to their attention that the persecutions of the Bahá'ís, including the economic pressures being exerted on the community, still abound since President Hassan Rouhani came to power and that there is no sign of their abating. The recent case in which twenty-four individuals in Gorgan received combined sentences of one hundred and ninety-three years' imprisonment for their provision, in their communities, of moral education to children up to the age of fourteen provides a striking example of the extreme and unthinking prejudice towards the Bahá'ís that is allowed expression in the Iranian judicial system. Of course, relevant non-governmental organizations should also be briefed in a timely way and urged to ensure that the treatment of minorities is given serious consideration alongside any potential economic development within Iran.

Your Offices of External Affairs will be required to present to officials powerful accounts of the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, and reference to copies of the Iran News Bulletin that have been sent to you will assist in this regard. They give summaries of acts of persecution perpetrated in the last year in the areas of economic activity and higher education.

Alongside the actions of Offices of External Affairs, the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office will be undertaking complementary initiatives at the international level.

Kindly keep the House of Justice and the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office apprised of the outcome of your ongoing endeavours. You may be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold for the confirmation of your efforts.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre
Bahá'í International Community,
United Nations Office,
New York and Geneva
Bahá'í International Community,
Brussels Office
Offices of External Affairs of the
National Assemblies of Australia, Austria,
Brazil, Canada (Ottawa and Toronto), France,
Germany, India, Ireland, the Netherlands,
New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain,
Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom,
and the United States